

## MEMORANDUM

## NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

State Dept. review completed

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December 23, 1972

OBE

MEMORANDUM FOR:

MR. KISSINGER

FROM:

JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE

SUBJECT:

Internal Lao Talks - Guidance for  
Ambassador Godley

Attached at Tab B is a request from Ambassador Godley for guidance on Lao initiative to informally explore with the DRV in Paris the possibility of a Lao ceasefire before an end to fighting in Vietnam. Godley reports that two senior RLG members (Defense Minister Sisouk and Paris Ambassador Khamphan Panya) have suggested such a move to Prime Minister Souvanna and that Souvanna reportedly approved.

They argued that the trail issue is the main obstacle to a Lao settlement, that an effective ICC would compensate for an end to U.S. bombing on the trail and that in any event the trail is increasingly less important as an enemy LOC to South Vietnam.

Godley notes that Souvanna is well aware of our preference for a Lao ceasefire following a Vietnam ceasefire. Both he and General Haig have stressed this point in recent talks with the Prime Minister. The Ambassador's own hunch is to "wait and see what comes out of this Lao effort."

In reply, we have prepared a draft message from you to Godley (Tab A) which thanks him for the information but repeats our opposition to a prior Lao ceasefire. We also ask the Ambassador for more information on the initiative. In the message we note that we may not need to discourage the move if it specifically provides for a strong ICC presence on the trail and a total split on political and military issues. These conditions, we believe, should make the proposal unacceptable to the Pathet Lao and thus again cast them on the defensive. In any event, the DRV no doubt will rebuff the RLG and send them back to the Pathet Lao.

MORI C05074277

RECOMMENDATION:

That you approve the message at Tab A.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_

Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

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XGDS 2-3 BY AUTH MR. KISSINGER

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TO: Ambassador Godley, Eyes Only 25X1

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

REF: Your Vientiane 630 [REDACTED]

1. Thank you for your prompt reporting of the RLG's interest in exploring with the DRV in Paris an immediate settlement in Laos prior to a Vietnam agreement.
2. We still believe that a Lao settlement should follow - repeat - follow an end to fighting in Vietnam. However, we see no need to step in at this moment, provided the RLG initiative calls specifically for a strengthened ICC with full access to the trail and also for a split in political and military issues. These riders should make the move unacceptable to Hanoi who in any event will refer the RLG back to the LPF.
3. In discussing this initiative with Lao leaders, we therefore suggest that you repeat our standard position on the matter of timing of a Lao settlement and assure yourself that the proposal will contain the elements in para 2. However, if you judge that the contents and circumstances of the initiative are such that the Pathet Lao might respond favorably, we ask your advice on how we could discourage the RLG from proceeding further with the matter. We are also concerned with the conclusions

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of Sisouk and Khamphan about the trail's declining importance (it still is critical at least to Cambodia and remains important to South Vietnam) and about the relative unimportance of the LPF's political demands as an obstacle to a settlement. You should try to correct these assumptions in your talks.

4. Warm regards,

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*Holmes*  
*Return*

FM AMBASSADOR GODLEY, VIENTIANE 630

TO THE WHITE HOUSE, EYES ONLY FOR DR. KISSINGER

SINCE GENERAL HAIG'S DEPARTURE FROM VIENTIANE, THERE HAS BEEN ONE INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT RELATED TO HIS TOUR OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA. AS YOU MAY HAVE NOTED FROM HAIG'S CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA AND AS WE REPORTED IN VIENTIANE 9765, LAO ARE CONCERNED THAT UNDER PRESENT SCENARIO WHERE LAOS CEASEFIRE WOULD FOLLOW VIETNAM CEASEFIRE, A SETTLEMENT IN LAOS IS BEING POSTPONED BECAUSE OF THE IMPASSE IN THE US-NORTH VIETNAMESE NEGOTIATIONS. AS FORESHADOWED IN THE PENULTIMATE PARAGRAPH OF MY TELEGRAM 9765, SOUVANNA WAS APPROACHED BY TWO OF HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATES ABOUT EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF CONCLUDING A CEASEFIRE IN LAOS WITHOUT AWAITING A SETTLEMENT IN VIETNAM. MINISTER SISOUK, PROBABLY THE BRIGHTEST LAO IN THE GOVERNMENT, WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE AND FINANCE, AND KHAMPHAN PANYA, FORMER DELEGATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND PRESENTLY LAO AMBASSADOR IN PARIS, APPROACHED SOUVANNA PHOUMA EITHER LATE DECEMBER 20 OR EARLY DECEMBER 21 TO DISCUSS WITH HIM WHAT, IF ANYTHING, LAO SHOULD DO TO MOVE FORWARD PROSPECT FOR SETTLEMENT IN LAOS. THE REASON FOR THIS PRECIPITATED MEETING WAS THE DEPARTURE ON DECEMBER 21 OF KHAMPHAN PANYA FOR PARIS AFTER A THREE-WEEK VISIT TO LAOS WHERE HE CONSULTED WITH PRIME MINISTER AND KING.

SISOUK AND KHAMPHAN PANYA SUGGESTED TO SOUVANNA THAT KHAMPHAN PANYA BE INSTRUCTED TO EXPLORE VERY INFORMALLY AND UNOFFICIALLY WHETHER THE NORTH VIETNAMESE IN PARIS MIGHT BE RECEPTIVE TO SETTLING THE LAO PROBLEM FIRST. SOUVANNA APPROVED. THE LAO FEAR THAT A PROLONGED STALEMATE IN THE US-NORTH VIETNAMESE NEGOTIATIONS AND NO SETTLEMENT IN LAOS WOULD STRAIN LAOS DEFENSE POSTURE. THE LAO REASONING AS WE HAVE RECEIVED IT FROM SISOUK IS AS FOLLOWS:

AS LONG AS THE FIGHTING CONTINUES IN CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM THE NORTH VIETNAMESE NEED THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL. THE AMERICAN BOMBING OF THE TRAIL MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT

\*\*\*\*\* WHSR COMMENT \*\*\*\*\*

HAK, HAIG, KENNEDY, HOWE, LORD

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FOR THE NORTH VIETNAMESE TO GET THEIR SUPPLIES AND MANPOWER TO THEIR DESTINATIONS IN THE SOUTH. IF THE AMERICAN BOMBING OF THE TRAIL COULD BE REPLACED BY A STRONG INTERNATIONAL SUPERVISION OF THE TRAIL AREA, IT WOULD BE JUST AS MUCH, IF NOT MORE, OF A HINDERANCE TO THE NORTH VIETNAMESE BRINGING DOWN THEIR SUPPLIES THROUGH LAOS. FURTHERMORE, NOW THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARE RELYING TO A LARGE EXTENT ON USING THE DMZ AREA FOR INFILTRATING SUPPLIES AND MANPOWER THROUGH SOUTH VIETNAM PROPER, THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL IS NOT QUITE AS IMPORTANT AS IT WAS BEFORE THE NORTH VIETNAMESE INVASION OF SOUTH VIETNAM LAST SPRING. IN SHORT THE LAO BELIEVE AN INTERNATIONAL SUPERVISION OF THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL AREA WOULD SERVE A SIMILAR PURPOSE AS THE AMERICAN BOMBING OF THAT AREA. THIS IS REALLY THE PRIMARY PROBLEM STANDING IN THE WAY OF A SETTLEMENT IN LAOS. SISOUK BELIEVES THAT ALL THE OTHER ISSUES IN THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN RLG AND THE LPF ARE OF SECONDARY IMPORTANCE AND COULD BE RAPIDLY RESOLVED IF HANOI GIVES THE PATHET LAO THE GREEN LIGHT.

SISOUK ADDED THAT THE THREE LAO ALSO AGREED THAT PERHAPS THE IDEA OF PUTTING LAOS FIRST AND VIETNAM SECOND IN SEARCH FOR A CEASEFIRE MIGHT BE A GOOD TACTICAL MOVE SINCE IT WOULD SAVE HANOI FACE IF DRV WANTS TO MOVE AHEAD WITH A POLITICAL SOLUTION IN INDOCHINA BUT NOT WISHING TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY ARE BENDING TO AMERICAN MILITARY PRESSURE. THE LAO ALSO SPECULATED THAT IF THE US-NORTH VIETNAMESE NEGOTIATIONS REMAINED DEADLOCKED, THEN PERHAPS THE US GOVERNMENT MIGHT LOOK WITH A FAVORABLE EYE ON EFFORTS TO RESOLVE AT LEAST ONE OF THE THREE INDOCHINA PROBLEMS. THE LAOS PROBLEM IS BY FAR THE LEAST COMPLICATED OF THE PROBLEMS OF THIS PENINSULA. SOUVANNA THUS GAVE HIS AMBASSADOR IN PARIS THE GREEN LIGHT TO EXPLORE DIRECTLY WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE THEIR RECEPTIVITY TO MOVING FORWARD ON A CEASEFIRE IN LAOS. SISOUK CONTINUED THAT THE THREE LAO INVOLVED IN THIS EFFORT ARE CONVINCED THAT A SOLUTION IN LAOS CAN ONLY BE OBTAINED BY INITIATING DISCUSSIONS WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES WHO ARE THE REAL MASTERS OF THE PATHET LAO. THE LPF DELEGATION HERE IN VIENTIANE DOES NOT REALLY HAVE FULL POWERS AND THAT A MAJOR STRATEGIC CHANGE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS SUCH AS TRYING TO OBTAIN A CEASEFIRE IN LAOS BEFORE VIETNAM WOULD IN ANY CASE REQUIRE HANOI'S BLESSING. HENCE THE PARIS SOUNDING. SISOUK STRESSED THAT THE THREE LAO MENTIONED PLUS DCM DEAN AND MYSELF, ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO KNOW ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE AND IT SHOULD BE VERY CLOSELY HELD.

I WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING GUIDANCE ON HOW TO HANDLE THIS MOST RECENT LAO INITIATIVE. AS YOU KNOW, BOTH GENERAL HAIG AND I HAVE STRESSED WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OUR PREFERENCE FOR HAVING A LAOS CEASEFIRE FOLLOW A SETTLEMENT IN VIETNAM. HENCE PRIME MINISTER AND IMMEDIATE ASSOCIATES ARE FULLY AWARE OF OUR POSITION AND THEY TOOK THIS INITIATIVE ON THEIR OWN.

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PERHAPS OUT OF FRUSTRATION OF SEEING THE WAR IN LAOS DRAG ON, A PROSPECT THEY FEAR. MY OWN HUNCH IS THAT WE SHOULD WAIT AND SEE WHAT COMES OUT OF THIS LAO EFFORT WHICH WE WILL NOT KNOW FOR AT LEAST A WEEK TO TEN DAYS.

I WOULD SUGGEST YOU ASK BILL SULLIVAN TO BRIEF YOU RE KHAMPHAN WHOM HE KNOWS VERY WELL.

MERRY CHRISTMAS.

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